

February 2019

# WILD DEER *in Victoria*

BRIEFING  
FOR MEMBERS  
OF THE 59<sup>TH</sup>  
PARLIAMENT

Issues and priorities  
for deer management  
and deer hunting  
in Victoria.



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# INTRODUCTION

Wild deer have been established in Victoria since the mid 1800's when they were introduced by acclimatisation societies.



Of the six species of wild deer present in Australia; four (sambar, hog, fallow and red) have self-sustaining wild populations in Victoria.

An increase in wild deer abundance and distribution in recent decades has been caused both by a collapse in the deer farming industry and subsequent illegal (either intentional or accidental) releases, and, in the wild sambar population in the East of the state reaching an inflection point, aided by habitat change in the wake of the series of catastrophic alpine bushfires commencing with the Caledonia fire of 1997.

The management of overabundant wild deer is now an issue of interest to the broader Victorian community. Unfortunately, the lack of general knowledge about deer and wildlife management tends to lead to an atmosphere which favours sensationalism

and ideology over facts, data, context and nuance. It's far easier to prosecute a simplistic catchphrase than it is to describe a complex, dynamic and multi-faceted situation.

In early January 2019, Victoria's Game Management Authority (GMA) released its latest annual report on game licencing statistics.

The report shows a year on year increase of 2,374 game licences for deer hunting. Since 1995 the number of licences for deer hunting have grown from 7,708 to 36,776—an increase of 29,068 or nearly 400 per cent.

Over the same period licences for duck and quail hunting have risen by just under nine per cent.

For context, the population of the State of Victoria over the same period increased by around 30 per cent. The

other strong trend in Victoria over that period has been urbanisation—a factor which has traditionally been considered to work against hunting. A heat map of deer hunters by local government area shows a heavy concentration through the South-Eastern corridor of Melbourne into the East of the State, suggesting that hunting remains strong and culturally acceptable in 'blue collar' outer suburbs and in large regional centres.

Licences endorsed for deer hunting now make up more than 71 per cent of game licences in Victoria.

Demographically deer hunting is still very male dominated. Males hold 96.3 per cent of all deer licences.

The challenge for organisations such as the Australian Deer Association is to best represent the interests of this growing cohort of 'deer people'.

# THE VICTORIAN APPROACH

In Victoria, wild deer are legally classified as a game species.

There is confusion about this classification as it is taken to mean that wild deer are afforded an extra level of 'protection' from government agencies as a consequence.

This is not the case, other than for hog deer (which exist in small numbers along the coastal strip from Wilsons Promontory through to Lakes Entrance), wild deer

can be hunted in Victoria year-round with no bag limits or other restrictions other than to ensure animal welfare and public safety.

Wild deer (other than hog deer) are unprotected on private land in Victoria.

Game licencing is a platform which enables the orderly administration of game hunting on public land.

In jurisdictions where wild deer hold game status and hunters are licenced (Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania), government departments have an ability to collect valuable data on economic activity, hunter effort, harvest rates and other demographic information which, in turn, leads to more informed and effective management decisions and initiatives.



# Compliance —and— Enforcement

Compliance and enforcement of hunting laws is a serious issue both for hunters and for the broader community.

In reality the issue of compliance and enforcement should be viewed as two separate streams—the first is the regulation of licensed game hunters in the field, the second is the policing of illegal deer hunting related activity in the broader community (spotlighting, trespass, shooting from roads etc.).

The Game Management Authority (GMA) has been criticized in the past for failings in the regulation of licensed game hunters in the field. Some of this criticism was arguably warranted, much of it was not. There is a serious structural impediment whereby GMA officers are required to be accompanied by two Victorian Police

officers when conducting compliance checks of licenced game hunters in the field.

The Australian Deer Association welcomes an internal re-structure within the GMA to address issues and the Government's commitment to increase the GMA's staffing by 30 per cent and to increase its resourcing by \$6million a year. Our view is that this will address some of the issues associated with the regulation of licenced game hunters.

The policing of illegal deer hunting activity in the broader community should, primarily, be the responsibility of Victoria



Police. There is an urgent need for a more co-ordinated focus on illegal deer hunting with data collection emerging as a real issue. The death of Bryce Airs at Jamieson in November 2017 is suspected to be related to illegal deer hunting activity as is the non-fatal shooting of a camper in State Forest at Tallarook in December last year.

# COMPLETION OF THE **Victorian Deer** Management Strategy

The Australian Deer Association has long advocated for the adoption of a deer management strategy for Victoria and we were delighted when the Andrews Government included it in the Sustainable Hunting Action Plan (SHAP).

The draft strategy is in the final stages of completion following exhaustive consultation across the community. At all stages the Australian Deer Association has been mindful that, although requested and driven by hunters, and completed under the auspices of the SHAP, the final strategy needs to be a document which meets the needs of a broad cross-section of interested stakeholders in the community.

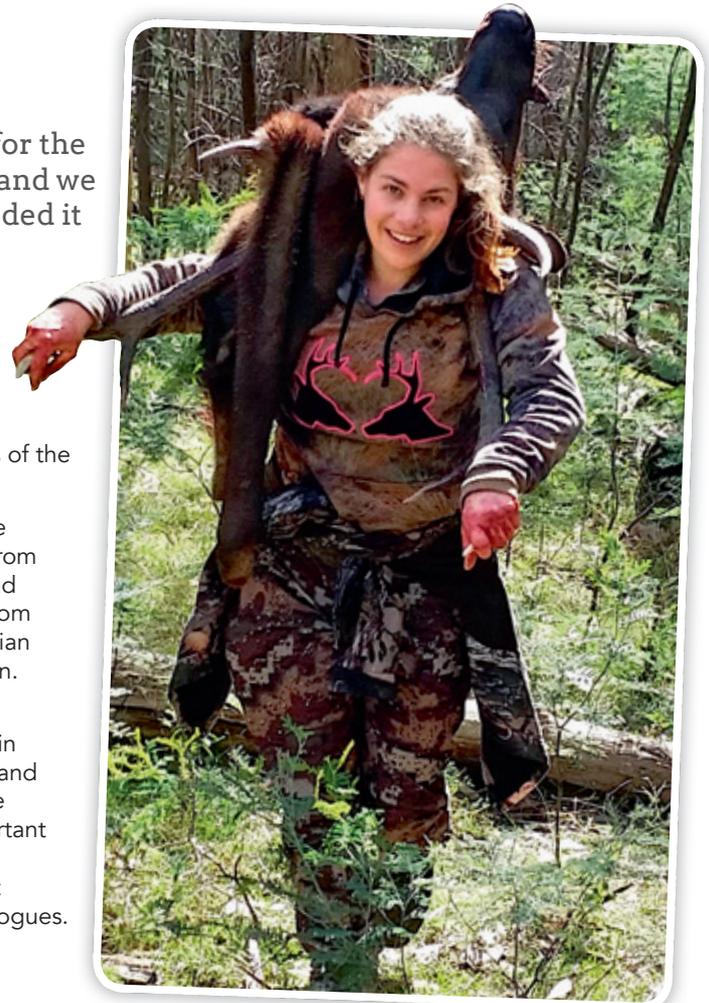
The final draft as presented takes a logical and practical approach to wild deer management and follows strong principles which have been established and proven in wildlife management both locally and internationally.

We are aware of a move within the project team to remove reference to a "Resource Management Zone" in the final strategy. To do so would be to ignore the role of hunters as stakeholders

in deer management and the social and economic value associated with licenced deer hunting. In effect, it would be to ignore the stated policies of the Victorian Government.

This move from within the project team follows on from a noisy but misleading and misinformed campaign from groups such as the Victorian National Parks Association.

Victorian hunters have approached this process in the spirit of compromise and mutual benefit, we will be disappointed if this important SHAP action is derailed because the Government capitulates to noisy ideologues.



## PROCESSING OF **WILD SHOT GAME** FOR PERSONAL USE

The ability to take wild shot venison to commercial processors for personal use is an aspiration of Victorian deer hunters and the Australian Deer Association.

# HUNTER ACCESS TO LICENSED CROWN LAND



There is an ongoing issue with enabling access to licenced crown land for deer hunting. The current exclusion is based on flawed historical advice from the Victorian Government Solicitors Office.

Despite contemporary advice asserting that there are no legal grounds for hunter exclusion; the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning has refused to change the arrangements in policy. The view of the ADA is that the bureaucrats deliberately delayed rectifying the issue in the year leading up to the 2018 State Election in the hope that momentum would be lost and change could be avoided.

In the lead up to the 2018 State Election the Labor party made the following commitment to the Australian Deer Association:

*Labor will continue to work with you ... to resolve issues around mapping and access to crown land licenced for grazing for deer hunting.*

The Australian Deer Association favours a solution which meets the needs of all

land users. The following path forward was jointly proposed by the Australian Deer Association and the Mountain Cattlemen's Association (MCAV) in 2004. We believe that it forms a solid basis for swift and clear resolution in 2019:

For the purposes of deer hunter access crown land should be treated as if private land if;

- the land is in the form of unused roads, water frontages or other small plots of land,
- the land is usually licensed to the adjacent farmer,
- the licence is for at least the full year,
- the licence provides the licence holder with land management responsibilities,
- the licence holder pays municipal rates, and,
- the licensed area has not traditionally

been used to access State Game Reserves and other traditional hunting areas.

Crown land should be not be regarded as private land if;

- the land involves large grazing area licences,
- the licence is for a grazing season and less than a full year,
- the licence does not provide the licence holder with land management responsibilities,
- the licence holder does not pay municipal rates.

In the small windows where there is overlap between hunting and seasonal grazing activity, the hunting community is committed to working with the MCAV on education and signage to avoid conflict and disruption.

Sharing wild food with friends and family, or 'venison diplomacy' as we call it, is an important part of explaining the motivations of hunters and protecting and extending our social licence in the broader community.

Wild sambar deer are a large animal — weighing up to 130 kg, consequently, the proper processing of carcasses for consumption is either very difficult or impossible for a large cohort of hunters, for a variety of

reasons (accommodation, disability, time constraints etc.).

Changes to allow wild shot venison to be taken to commercial premises for processing for personal use were included in the Primary Industries Legislative Amendment Bill, which was not enacted by the previous Parliament owing to amendments from the Legislative Council which were unacceptable to the Government.

Ultimately we would like to be able to



share that food with the disadvantaged in our community (as happens in the USA), however, that would be some time down the track.

# SUSTAINABLE HUNTING ACTION PLAN



The Sustainable Hunting Action Plan (SHAP) is, arguably, the most important government initiative in game hunting in a generation.

On the announcement of the SHAP the Australian Deer Association, along with Field & Game Australia, committed to regularly publishing progress on the SHAP against a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's).

Whilst published progress reports from government agencies have been

sporadic, the publication of this external accountability has been regular and consistent, and, in our view, quite valuable.

Generally, we have been delighted with the implementation of the SHAP to date and we are pleased that Government has committed to developing and

delivering another SHAP on the completion of the current plan by 2020.

More significant progress on the current SHAP is imminent.

The following KPI report is as published in the February 2019 editions of Australian Deer, Field & Game and Conservation and Hunting magazines.

Performance indicators: Rating from 1 to 5

1 = Does not meet expectations 5 = Exceeds expectations

OUTCOME: RESPONSIBLE, SAFE AND HUMANE HUNTING			
OBJECTIVE 1: PROMOTE RESPONSIBLE HUNTING			PERFORMANCE
Responsible hunting actions are focussed on providing better information, education and training programs to hunters, collaborating with stakeholders to promote responsible hunting, and improving enforcement.	<b>KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS</b>	Clearly define "responsible" hunting <b>Not completed</b>	2 ↓
		Timely development and dissemination of key messages in advance of hunting seasons – duck, quail, deer <b>Duck season announcements still unnecessarily late. Great improvement in other messaging</b>	2 ↑
		Youth education programs developed with hunting organisations to address increasing urbanisation and create pathways to ethical hunting <b>No real progress</b>	2 →
		Structured program to deliver key messages and education programs to dealer network; including non-toxic shot, SEP, WIT, deer education (ADA), deer hunting with hounds, firearm safety, marksmanship <b>Progressing well, particularly with SEP and ADA Hunter Education</b>	3 ↑
		Show genuine progress on enabling GMA enforcement officers to operate without Victoria Police support by 1 December 2017 <b>No progress</b>	1 ↓
		Development and support of hunting tourism strategies with local government (e.g. Towong Shire hunting tourism strategy) <b>Government worked productively with Towong Shire, however the Shire capitulated to a misinformation campaign. More work needed with sensible municipalities</b>	2.5 →

ACTIONS		STATUS
1.1	Provide better access to information through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a single, comprehensive hunting website;</li> <li>improved distribution network for a new hunting manual; and</li> <li>the upgrading of the game licensing system to allow for more targeted messaging to hunters.</li> </ul> <b>V2.0 of Victorian hunting app progressing, licensing system in development</b>	↑
1.2	Educate and train new hunters by reviewing and releasing a comprehensive manual on how to hunt in Victoria. <b>V2.0 of Hunting Manual in development. Current manual in place and well received</b>	↑
1.3	Improve compliance and enforcement through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a clear compliance policy;</li> <li>targeting resources to ensure compliance and prevent illegal behaviour by hunters;</li> <li>improvement of 136 186 help line for proactive reporting of illegal activity;</li> <li>agreed standards for compliance across all government departments and agencies; and</li> <li>reporting on convictions for illegal hunting.</li> </ul> <b>More strategic approach to compliance welcome but scope and resourcing still inadequate and structural issues not properly addressed</b>	↓
1.4	Work with hunting stakeholders to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>continue delivering the 'RESPECT: Hunt Responsibly' program;</li> <li>organise volunteer resources to complement professional agencies in peak seasons, providing peer regulation;</li> <li>expand distribution of hunting information to hunting organisations and retail businesses; and</li> <li>attend relevant outdoor events to promote responsible hunting.</li> </ul> <b>Information sharing and attendance at events etc. has improved, however organisation of volunteer resources has not commenced in any meaningful way</b>	↓
1.5	Update hunting-related welfare codes to ensure hunting practices are humane and encourage the considerate treatment of animals that are hunted and used for hunting. <b>Some progress shown</b>	→
1.6	Improve firearm carriage, transport and storage compliance by working with Firearms Safety Foundation (Victoria) to develop information and run relevant safety courses. <b>GMA have developed some excellent material</b>	↑

OUTCOME: FULL UTILISATION OF GAME			
OBJECTIVE 2: GROWING HUNTING'S BENEFITS			PERFORMANCE
Hunting's benefits will be maximised by using social media to announce upcoming seasons and variations, making game meat processing easier, monitoring economic benefits and facilitating tourism.	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Government to communicate environmental, economic and social benefits of hunting, mirroring the approach applied to "Target 1 Million" recreational fishing initiative <b>Very minimal promotion and certainly not a mirror in tone or substance of "Target 1 Million"</b>	1 →
		Incorporate benefits from hunting within State Government tourism communications, top five local government area by economic benefits (refer to the 2014 DEPI economic benefits of hunting report) <b>Not attempted</b>	1 ↓
		Variations to hunting seasons are by exception only, and underpinned by contemporary, science-led, management frameworks agreed by government and relevant hunting organisations <b>Variations to species and opening times for ducks has not met this standard</b>	2 →
		Commercial processing of wild deer for personal use effective 1 December 2017 <b>Was attempted and delayed by parliamentary process. Commercial processing for commercial use has progressed</b>	3 ↑
		Measurable progress with commercial processing of wild duck, quail, and exotic game birds demonstrated by 1 December 2017 <b>Not progressed</b>	1 →

ACTIONS		STATUS
2.1	Improve seasonal announcements by effectively communicating information to stakeholders when seasonal variations are required or areas are temporarily closed to hunting. (Early advice will be provided through the Victorian Game Hunting App, Twitter and Facebook.) <b>2017 Duck season announcement was unreasonably late</b>	↓
2.2	Facilitate game meat processing by investigating and reducing barriers to the processing of wild harvested game meat to allow optimal use of game harvest. <b>Progressed well. Final piece is the amendment to allow non-commercial processing of all game meat</b>	↑
2.3	Monitor social and economic benefits by conducting a study every five years to determine the contribution of hunting to the economy. This will inform investment decisions, and improve services and regulatory outcomes. <b>Planned and progressing</b>	↑
2.4	Promote regional hunting opportunities through targeted communication with relevant regional agencies and organisations. <b>Not adequately attempted. Some efforts made.</b>	↓

## OUTCOME: INCLUSIVE REGIONAL GROWTH

### OBJECTIVE 3: IMPROVING HUNTING OPPORTUNITIES

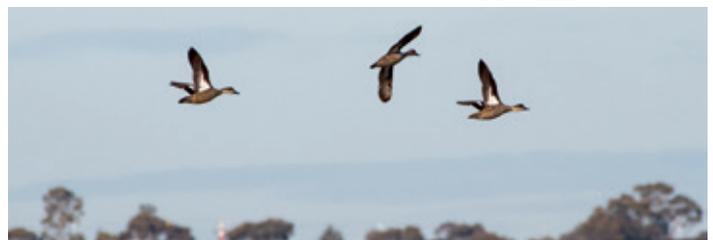
#### PERFORMANCE

Hunting opportunities will be improved by providing clear information on where, when and what people can hunt, improving access to hunting locations, expanding pest and game hunting opportunities, and working with Traditional Owners.	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS		
		Government and agencies websites and other channels to incorporate information relevant to hunting, updated at the time of each announcement <b>Good progress, particularly on GMA website</b>	3 ↑
		'State Game Reserve' status and 'hunting' icon to be used on all physical signage and printed or electronic references (e.g. 'Wildlife Reserve' the current primary classification and avoids use of 'State Game Reserve') <b>Progressing well. Confidence that project will be completed</b>	4 ↑
		Government maps to include reference where there are hunting opportunities <b>Progressing well and expected in January 2019. Only exception is licensed land where DELWP policy does not reflect the legal status of the land</b>	3 ↑
		Scope of expanded game and pest animal hunting opportunities to be communicated to relevant hunting organisations by 30 June 2017 <b>Progress including 90,000ha of deer hunting in Eastern Victoria, continuation of balloted hunting on Snake Island and the addition of the Kerang State Game Reserve. No formal process in place and engagement is still piecemeal and opportunistic</b>	4 ↑
		Prioritise action to create or improve access, where currently limited, to State Game Reserves <b>Progressing well through signage project</b>	3 ↑
		Scope how hunting and Traditional Owners can be mutually inclusive by 30 June 2017 <b>Progress demonstrated in Boort Management Plan and Gunaikurnai Management Plan</b>	2.5 ↑
		Erect and maintain clear and appropriate signage on entrance points to all National Parks where seasonal deer stalking is permitted. <b>Progressing well. Confidence that project will be completed</b>	4 ↑

### ACTIONS

#### STATUS

3.1	Improve hunting location knowledge through the following actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>developing a map set for Victoria showing where different game hunting can occur on public land;</li> <li>improving signage on State Game Reserves; and</li> <li>improving signage on other public land where hunting is permitted including National Parks and high-use State Forests.</li> </ul> <b>Excellent progress</b>	↑
3.2	Provide better hunting access through the following actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>improving physical access to State Game Reserves; and</li> <li>reviewing opportunities to use existing helipad facilities in alpine regions (excluding areas reserved under the National Parks Act 1975) to facilitate improved access to areas where hunting is permitted.</li> </ul> <b>Helipad action is flawed by the exclusion of National Parks. This is seen as a deliberate bureaucratic impediment which should be addressed</b>	↓
3.3	Expand pest hunting by exploring further hunting opportunities by game licence holders at State Game Reserves, subject to appropriate pest control protocols. <b>Progressed well. Scope needs to be extended beyond duck season</b>	→
3.4	Expand game hunting by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>removing restrictions on hunting other deer species in areas reserved under the National Parks Act 1975 where Sambar Deer hunting is already permitted;</li> <li>promoting hunting opportunities in Victoria to niche tourist markets, both interstate and internationally, including expanding delivery of game licence accreditation (e.g. WIT) to provide for interstate hunters; and</li> <li>exploring options to expand hunting in Victoria in partnership with Traditional Owners, land managers and relevant stakeholders.</li> </ul> <b>Progressing well</b>	↑
3.5	Partner with Traditional Owners to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>continue to build participation in land management and conservation, and</li> <li>develop a Victorian Traditional Owner Game Hunting Strategy.</li> </ul> <b>Needs more work. Involvement has been driven by hunters, not government</b>	↓
3.6	Develop an online game licensing system that allows online processing and payment of game licences. <b>Progressing well</b>	↑



## OUTCOME: SECURE THE FUTURE OF HUNTING

OBJECTIVE 4: ENSURING SUSTAINABLE HUNTING		PERFORMANCE	
Sustainable hunting will be secured through sound research, habitat improvement, working with hunting organisations on control programs, developing a deer management strategy, and improving data collection.	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Deliver audit of State Game Reserves to hunting organisations by February 2017 <b>Completed</b>	4 ↑
		Science-led approach to develop habitat improvement for State Game Reserves, including food sources <b>Pilot project in development</b>	2.5 →
		Develop a draft deer management strategy and put to external review by properly qualified game managers by December 2017, allowing sufficient response time for external stakeholders to seek independent expert advice <b>Project late but well developed</b>	4 ↑
		Investment in game management research demonstrated by government, incorporated within regulator and policy development <b>Game management research strategy developed. Requires funding</b>	3 ↑

ACTIONS	STATUS
<p>4.1 Undertake research, monitoring and evaluation through the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• developing a game species research strategy to better understand the distribution, abundance and recruitment of game species and the impact of hunting activity;</li> <li>• basing policy and decisions on relevant data and information regarding abundance as opposed to point-in-time location;</li> <li>• researching land and habitat management techniques to benefit native game species;</li> <li>• tagging, banding and monitoring game to better understand movements and breeding cycles;</li> <li>• assessing relationships between hunting seasons and local ecosystems around hunting reserves; and</li> <li>• implementing the Waterfowl Conservation Harvest Model to ensure the sustainable management of game ducks.</li> </ul> <p><b>Partially progressed. Moving from political decisions to data based decisions is the ongoing challenge</b></p>	→
<p>4.2 Improve State Game Reserve habitat by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• building on an audit of all State Game Reserves;</li> <li>• developing management principles to maintain quality habitats; and</li> <li>• establishing two demonstration sites, in collaboration with hunting organisations, where the new management principles will be put into practice.</li> </ul> <p><b>Pilot program under development</b></p>	→
<p>4.3 Develop a deer management strategy that sets a strategic plan to maintain sustainable hunting opportunities, while reducing the impact of deer on biodiversity on all land tenures in the state.</p> <p><b>Progressing well</b></p>	↑
<p>4.4 Improve control programs by working with accredited volunteer shooters to contribute to pest and deer control programs by establishing additional agreements with hunting organisations.</p> <p><b>Progressing well</b></p>	↑
<p>4.5 Improve data collection by exploring new ways and technologies to collect hunting activity information</p> <p><b>Undeveloped. Has great potential</b></p>	↓
<p>4.6 Support the National Hunting Archive by helping the Archive to develop an electronic catalogue system of historical information that can be accessed by the public.</p> <p><b>Funded</b></p>	→

OUTCOME	Current progress (1 = Does not meet expectations 5 = Exceeds expectations)
Responsible, safe and humane hunting	2.08 – Slightly below expectations – Progress patchy
Full utilisation of game	1.60 – Below expectations – Progress being made
Inclusive regional growth	3.35 – On track to meet expectations – More progress needed
Secure the future of hunting	3.37 – on track to meet expectations. Some actions need attention
Overall	2.60 – Meeting our expectation at the half way point of the plan. Still some serious work and re-commitment required if the plan is to meet its full potential. Some excellent progress being made. Clear that ongoing accountability is critical.





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